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THE BLONDE MAN'S BABY

By Dorothy Douglas

Cynthia gazed through the hedge that separated her garden from the one next door.

"Little darling," she breathed and her nerves quivered for a touch of the tiny mite who played among the sunflowers at the foot of the garden.

"Da, da, da!" The child's high-pitched voice followed each attempt as she strained on tip-toe for the great yellow heads.

"It must be that blonde man's baby." The minor part of Cynthia had gone off into disinterested theory as to baby's parentage. In a vague way she remembered having seen a very blonde man entering the gate next door. "That languid creature is the mother." She also recalled having seen a woman rocking idly on the veranda.

But the major part of Cynthia's being was given over to unceasing longing for the child; it's elfin beauty had possessed Cynthia's soul for the past ten days.

"Little lonely heart!" sighed Cynthia and hurried unflattering thoughts toward the blonde man and his languid wife.

She drew back behind a clump of bushes. A woman had come hurriedly into the garden next door. Cynthia watched her stoop and print a hasty kiss on the baby's cheek, after which she stepped out and into a waiting carriage.

Cynthia gasped. For a moment she couldn't believe what her senses told her—that the woman with the traveling coat and suit case had gone away and left the child alone.

A slow smile dawned in Cynthia's eyes. The maid in the next house was a Hungarian and could scarcely speak English. With both parents out of the way Cynthia realized that the baby was practically in her arms. Yet Cynthia had not prepared her-



He stopped at the window of an art store.

self for the great throb that shook her when the baby arms first tightened spasmodically about her neck. And as suddenly the awful fear gripped her that one day she would have to give up this love.

"You lonely, wistful, sad little thing," she cried. "What is your name, darling?"

"Da, da!"

Cynthia laughed.

"And your mamma's name?"

"Da, da!"

"Evidently Daddy is the sun, moon and stars to you," smiled Cynthia.

As day after day wore on the baby became a vital part of Cynthia's life. It became a nightly terror when as dusk drew down she stood beside the dividing hedge and put the clinging arms from about her neck.

Had the awful loneliness been less apparent in the child's life vague thoughts would not have entered Cynthia's mind. But that starting neglect together with her own over-developed love for beautiful children swept Cynthia from her feet. A torrent of fearful yet delightful schemes rushed through her mind.

Another week drew to a close. The woman of the rocker had not returned. The blonde man continued to come and go.

There could be no doubt that the man with his clear cut golden profile was the father of the baby. When Cynthia's passion for the baby was at its height a letter came from the art circles of Paris. A great prize was being offered for a child portrait. The restrictions were severe. The work must be done in France.

Before Cynthia had finished the letter she knew that she was going to kidnap the blonde man's baby! She felt it! It had been preordained. A hot wave surged through her body and she swept the child to her in a frenzy of joy.

When the joy of the moment had subsided Cynthia set about calmly to plan her escape. It would be simple. She had won the baby's love to such an extent that she would go without a murmur.

In the village no one knew much about Cynthia save that she was an artist; her time had been too valuable to waste in idle gossip. Cynthia doubted if the blonde man had even so much as glimpsed her in the garden.

In a fortnight's time Cynthia and

Toddles were sailing toward a tiny

villa in rural France. Cynthia had booked passage as Cynthia Ross and child.

Toddles was beginning to slip another word or two. Under the circumstances Cynthia considered it advisable to teach it the word "Mamma." It would save the situation.

Cynthia reveled in the possession of a bit of humanity that, for the time being, was all her own. She made innumerable sketches and when they arrived in her villa in France she hung them about the walls and made her selection for the prize portrait.

It was all of five months later that John Winthrop took his first stroll. In those five months, along Fifth avenue. The pilgrimage of illness was evident in a short cropped blonde head and a vanishing scar on one temple.

He stopped at the window of an art store that flaunted its latest treasure. For a long time his eyes rested on the central picture. It was a golden-haired baby standing on tip-toe and trying to reach the yellow head of a sunflower.

"Joyce!" burst from his lips. And with the movement of his lips something snapped within John Winthrop's head. Mists cleared and the light of understanding swept into his eyes; he drew a long draught of spring sunshine and realized that memory had returned to him.

Inside the shop he was informed that the portrait was not for sale. "It is the prize picture from the Institute contest," said the man in the art store.

"Cynthia—" Winthrop bent over the name in the corner of the canvass. "I don't make out the last name?"

"Ross—Cynthia Ross—she has a villa in Normandy," vouched the clerk. "Have you the exact address?"

questioned Winthrop. Another fortnight and John Winthrop made his way through the lanes to a villa in Normandy. Mingled emotions burned within him, but he had determined to give Cynthia Ross a chance to defend her action before putting the matter in less lenient hands than his own.

He saw her then as he approached the garden with the sun of glorious France shining on her hair and in her eyes. Toddles, some few feet away, was playing in the big sand hill.

Winthrop watched them for a long moment with a peculiar tightening of the jaw.

"Daddy!" the baby's high pitched voice rang out. She started toward him, but tripped over her little pail.

Cynthia cast one swift, hunted look into the blonde man's eyes and clasped the child convulsively in her arms. She turned defiantly toward him, then slowly her entire being drooped pitifully and very slowly she came toward Winthrop. Without raising the heavy eyelids she put the baby in his arms; her hand brushed his and the man quivered. Cynthia turned away.

"Mamma!" wailed Toddles.

A hot flame darted through Cynthia. She turned to meet the surprise in the blonde man's eyes.

"Nobody came to claim her!" she cried in self defense.

"I got a rap on the head—the week—"

"You have been ill!" put in Cynthia swiftly, contritely, "and I am the cause of it."

"No, no!" Winthrop pushed the blonde hair from his temple. "I was knocked down. This scar proves it. My memory only came back when I saw the portrait of—" He touched the baby's curls—"Joyce."

"Joyce!" Cynthia laughed more or less hysterically. "I am afraid she won't know that name!"

"What have you been calling her?"

"Oh—Toddles, Darling Sweetheart—anything that came into my head."

Gentleness, tenderness, all that was beautiful swept into Winthrop's eyes.

"It is rather strange that one who can love children so—should remain unmarried," was his quiet remark.

"I have never—liked men," said Cynthia, and a slow smile dawned.

The surprise in Winthrop's face turned to quizzical humor. Cynthia was not aware that her eyes were expressing things quite readable to the masculine eye.

"Nor I women," laughed Winthrop.

"Not even the mother of Toddles?"

Cynthia couldn't help asking.

"Toddles' mother was my brother's wife," said Winthrop; "the baby was orphaned when she was five months old—my sister and I have done the best we could, but my sister is not fond of children. You may have seen her on the porch."

"You have known I lived—"

"Since the first. I have watched you a hundred times." He caught her hand swiftly when she would have escaped. "Don't run away—little mother of Toddles." He spoke breathlessly, for the hand within his was trembling. "I have hoped always for this."

"You should hate and despise me," Cynthia's voice was broken. "Mamma!" A tiny voice called from the foot of the garden.

The flame made itself felt in both the man and the woman. Cynthia tried to drag her heavy glance from John Winthrop's eyes.

"I will—have to teach her not—to—call me—" The hysterical catch in Cynthia's voice cut off the last word.

"Don't do it, Cynthia Ross!" Winthrop drew her panting and breathless into his arms. "To the world and to the child herself she is my baby. If you take that word from my baby's lips I will have you arrested as a kidnaper." He lifted up the chin that had sunk very low. "Do you understand?"

"I begin to think I do," Cynthia laughed softly.

Hopkinsville Market Quotations.

Corrected Feb. 14, 1912.

RETAIL GROCERY PRICES.

Country lard, good color and clean 12½c per pound.

Country bacon, 12½c per pound.

Black-eyed peas, \$4.00 per bushel.

Country shoulders, 10c per pound.

Country hams, 18c per pound.

Irish potatoes, \$1.60 per bushel.

Northern eating Rural potatoes \$1.60 per bushel.

Texas eating onions, \$1.75 per bushel.

Red eating onions, \$1.75 per bushel.

Dried Navy beans, \$3.25 per bushel.

Cabbage, 4 cents a pound.

Dried Lima beans, 10c per pound.

Country dried apples, 12½c per pound.

Daisy cream cheese, 25c per pound.

Full cream brick cheese, 25c per pound.

Full cream Limberger cheese, 25c per pound.

Popcorn, dried on ear, 2c per pound.

Fresh Eggs 35c per doz.

Choice lots fresh, well-worked country butter, in pound prints, 30c.

FRUITS.

Lemons, 25c per dozen.

Navel Oranges, 30c, 40c, per doz.

Bananas, 15c and 20c doz.

New York State apples \$5.00 to \$6.00 per barrel.

Cash Price Paid For Produce.

POULTRY.

Dressed hens, 12½c per pound.

Dressed cocks, 7c per pound.

Live hens, 10c per pound; live cocks, 3c per pound; live turkeys, 13c per pound.

ROOTS, HIDES, WOOL AND TALLOW.

Prices paid by wholesale dealers to butchers and farmers:

Roots—Southern ginseng, \$5.75 lb.

"Golden Seal" yellow root, \$1.35 lb.

Mayapple, 3½; pink root, 12c and 13c.

Tallow—No. 1, 4½; No. 2, 4c.

Wool—Burry, 10c to 17c; Clear Grease, 21c, medium, tub washed, 23c to 30c; coarse, dingy, tub washed, 18c.

Feathers—Prime white goose, 50c; dark and mixed old goose, 15c to 30c; gray mixed, 15c to 30c; white duck, 22c to 35c, new.

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Fresh country butter 25c lb.

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Choice clover hay, \$16.00.

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White seed oats, 55c.

Black seed oats, 55c.

Mixed seed oats, 48c.

No. 2 white corn, 55c.

No. 2 mixed corn, 55c.

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